PTAS Project Report   (for SMALL PROJECT GRANTS)

Project Title: Using UX research methods to inform online course design at R(D)SVS

Principal Investigator : Nick Daniels
School / Department : Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies, Digital Education Unit

Team members :

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Grant recipients are expected to submit a brief report at the conclusion of their project which outlines briefly the following : nature of work completed; outcomes; benefits to student learning/student experience; dissemination activity (where relevant – actual and planned) and how the activity could inform future work or be transferred to other subject areas in the University. The brief report will be published on the IAD web pages.

Brief Report (maximum 500 words)

What did you do?

First, we sent out a top tasks survey to postgraduate students studying online with R(D)SVS. Students were asked to identify which tasks were most important to them when accessing their courses on Learn. This well-established UX research practice helps designers to prioritise which features of a website or app should be easy to find.

101 students responded to the survey. Each respondent was shown a list of 39 tasks they might want to complete on Learn, and from this they chose the five they considered the most important.

Following the survey, we interviewed 10 students to help us understand the context around the top tasks. We investigated how the tasks fit in to a typical week of study, which tasks are easy to complete, and which tasks students find frustrating.

As part of the interviews, we included short usability tests. Students were set a task on Learn: for instance, to check the deadline for an upcoming assessment. They attempted the task with minimal assistance while narrating their thoughts. This helped us to evaluate how easy these tasks were to complete while providing clues as to how the design of our courses could be improved.

The PTAS funding allowed us to employ the [UX Service](#) in Information Services, who provided valuable consultancy at each stage of the research, from planning to data analysis.

What did you find out?

The students chose the following as their top 5 tasks:

1. Lecture with combined audio and slides (received 13% of all votes cast)
2. Reading lists / study resources (13%)
3. Discussion boards (discuss course topics with fellow students and teachers) (10%)
4. Assignment feedback (7%)
5. Lecture notes / outlines (6%)

The interviews added further context to these findings. Most notably, we discovered:

- The existing design of our online courses on Learn caters for many of our participants' key tasks. Accessing lectures, submitting assignments and keeping up to date with discussion boards were generally reported as satisfactory experiences.
- Students had problems interacting with course materials via mobile devices.
- In some cases, assessment task instructions were perceived as complex, and there seemed to be potential for more concise instructions with key information made more prominent.
- When looking at a week's materials, the order in which activities were listed influenced the order in which students thought they should be completed.

How did you disseminate your findings?

Findings will be disseminated via:

- A blog post published on the Vet School's Digital Education Unit blog
- A poster presented at the University of Edinburgh Learning and Teaching Conference 2020

What have been the benefits to student learning?

The findings have added to our evidence base for how we design online PGT courses on Learn. This evidence has helped us to design a style guide and template that can be applied across our suite of online PGT courses.

How could these benefits be extended to other parts of the university?

This project complements findings from similar research completed by the UX Service as part of the Learn Foundations project, which focused on UG on-campus study. Though smaller in scale, this project demonstrates how UX research can inform the design of online PGT courses.

Who can be contacted for further details?

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The University of Edinburgh
Principal's Teaching Award Scheme

Financial statement (please delete as appropriate):

This project has utilised the funding awarded to it by the PTAS adjudication committee and the Principal Investigator or School Administrator appropriate can provide financial statements showing the funding usage as and when required by the UoE Development Trusts who may require it for auditing purposes.

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